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SIPDIS

FROM USMISSION UNESCO PARIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/OHI
STATE PASS TO NPS - STEPHEN MORRIS AND PAUL HOFFMAN

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: SCUL PL GM IS UNESCO
SUBJECT: TRYING TO POSTPONE THE AUSCHWITZ NAME CHANGE

REF: Paris 003344

¶11. (SBU) Summary: Israel is attempting to delay the Auschwitz name change issue from reaching UNESCO's World Heritage Conference for discussion or decision during the upcoming meeting in Vilnius next month. End Summary.

¶12. (SBU) Israeli Ambassador to UNESCO and current Charge d'Affairs for Israel's Embassy to France, David Kornbluth and Embassy officer Daniel Safran-Hon, met with Ambassador Oliver this afternoon, June 21st, to discuss the Polish government's efforts to formally change the name of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp on the World Heritage List to "Former Nazi German Concentration Camp Auschwitz-Birkenau." Ambassador Oliver had previously met with Poland's Ambassador to UNESCO, Maria Wodzynska-Walicka on this subject on May 18th at the Polish Ambassador's request (see reftel.)

¶13. (SBU) Ambassador Kornbluth said that the Israeli government is still deciding what change in the name it will be willing to accept. (US Mission comment: While there are a few vocal opponents to the proposed name change (the World Jewish Congress, in particular), according to press reports, most Jewish Holocaust survivors groups, as well as Yad Vashem and American Jewish Committee appear to be in agreement with the Polish government's proposal. End comment). Kornbluth said that ultimately a change that might add the word "extermination and concentration camp" would probably be acceptable to the Israeli government. For the Poles, whatever solution is found must include the words "Nazi German".

¶14. (SBU) The chief concern raised by the Israeli Ambassador was the speed with which the Polish government is attempting to push through the change in order to table the proposal at UNESCO's upcoming World Heritage Conference in Vilnius in early July. Kornbluth also noted that the Polish Ambassador has been attempting to play each side against the other in discussions between the Germans and Israelis. He said that the Germans feel themselves to be without power and cornered on the issue, waiting to see how the issue plays out between the Poles and the Israelis.

¶15. (SBU) Ambassador Oliver said that the postponement might be the best way to handle the issue for the moment, given the sensitivities, and added that the key to a solution is one in which the concerned parties are comfortable with the proposed changes.

¶16. (SBU) Ambassador Kornbluth said that discussions on the issue are still going on within Israel, leaving us with a clear indication that the Israeli government is having difficulty reaching a unified position on the subject.

¶17. (SBU) Kornbluth said that he is trying to get the Polish government's approval to postpone tabling the subject at Vilnius, citing technical complications. (Comment: The possibility that the technical reasons raised by the Israelis could be tied to a request for a vague management plan, may or may not be acceptable to the Polish government, again leaving some doubt as to whether the postponement is a done deal or not. End comment).

¶18. (SBU) The World Heritage Center's Director, Francesco Bandarin, has supposedly agreed to guide the postponement which will be made on behalf of the Secretariat, deflecting the source of the request, and will ask the appropriate International Experts Group to review the subject. At this time there has been no fixed date set for its onward review. Ambassador Kornbluth said that while the Germans were delighted about the possibility of postponement, he believes that the Poles are also pleased, as the name change, despite the delay, will remain on the table. Oliver